

Edwards: Historic Veterans, Military Construction Bill Passes House *It Respects Service of Troops, Veterans. It Includes Advanced Appropriations for First Time, & Builds on Historic Funding Increases*

(Washington, DC)- U.S. Representative Chet Edwards announced that the House passed vital funding for troops veterans, and their families under the fiscal year 2010 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill. The bill builds on the \$17.7 billion in historic increases for veterans passed into law by Congress since January 2007. The bill passed by a bipartisan vote of 415 to 3.

Edwards, Chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee said, "This bill sends a clear message to America's servicemen and women, their families, and our veterans that we deeply respect their service and sacrifice. With passage of this bill, Congress has provided a 58 percent increase in funding for veterans health care and benefits since January 2007. In addition we have a new 21st Century GI Education bill that now also transfers this important benefit to the children of those service members who have died while serving our country. This is an unprecedented increase in Congress' commitment to veterans, and in my book, our veterans have earned every dime of this funding.

"This funding has resulted in a total increase of 8,300 claims processors, 145 community-based outpatient clinics, 70 Vet Centers, and more than 47,000 additional Veterans Health Administration employees. These additional resources will provide our veterans with their benefits more quickly and improve access to health care and other services. Congress has also funded several initiatives to improve the quality of life for our military and their families to include: \$2.8 billion for new military hospitals, \$1 billion for new child care centers to serve 20,000 military children, and \$570 million in additional funding for barracks."

The bill is strongly supported by major veterans service organizations such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, and many others.

Glen M. Gardner Jr., a Vietnam veteran from Round Rock, Texas, who is the national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars said, "This is a huge step forward for disabled veterans, and the historic funding increases the House provides will dramatically improve the healthcare programs our nation delivers to her defenders. We have to thank House leadership from both sides of the aisle for making this happen, especially Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Chet Edwards (D-Texas) for spearheading the legislation."

Overall, the bill provides \$77.9 billion in discretionary spending, \$53 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, \$24.6 billion for Military Construction, Family Housing and BRAC, and \$266.8 million for related agencies. It is \$239 million more than the President's request and \$5 billion more than fiscal year 2009 level. For the first time ever, \$48.2 billion is provided in advance appropriations for fiscal year 2011 for three medical accounts: medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities.

Bill Total

- 2009 Enacted: \$72.9 billion
- President's Request: \$77.7 billion
- House Passage: \$77.9 billion

KEY INVESTMENTS

Historic Increases in Support of our Military and Veterans: With passage of this bill, Congress has provided a 58 percent increase in funding for veterans health care and benefits since January 2007. This funding has resulted in a total increase of 8,300 claims processors, 145 community-based outpatient clinics, 70 Vet Centers, and more than 47,000 additional Veterans Health Administration employees. These additional resources will provide our veterans with their benefits more quickly and improve access to health care and other services. Congress has also funded several initiatives to improve the quality of life for our military and their families to include: \$2.8 billion for new military hospitals, \$1 billion for new child care centers to serve 20,000 military children, and \$570 million in additional funding for barracks.

Overview of the Fiscal Year 2010 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act:

- DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: \$108.9 billion, the same as the President's Request and \$14.5 billion above 2009, for veterans medical care, claims processors, and facility improvements. In addition, for the first time ever, \$48.2 billion is provided in advance appropriations for fiscal year 2011 for three medical accounts: medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities.
- Veterans Health Administration (VHA): \$45.1 billion, the same as the President's Request and \$4.4 billion above 2009 after adjusting for transfers approved by the Committee on January

6, 2009, for veterans medical care to include:

- Medical Services: \$34.7 billion, the same as the President's Request and \$4.0 billion above 2009 after adjusting for approved transfers, to improve access to medical services for all veterans.
- Mental Health: \$4.6 billion, the same as the President's Request and \$800 million above 2009, for mental health care.
- Assistance for Homeless Vets: \$3.2 billion, the same as the President's Request and \$949 million above 2009, includes \$26 million for a Presidential Initiative to combat homelessness, \$150 million for the homeless grants and per diem program, \$20 million for supportive services for low income veterans and families, in addition to \$21 million to hire additional personnel for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program.
- Rural Health: The Department estimates that \$440 million will be spent in fiscal year 2010 on innovative practices to improve access to care for veterans in rural areas. More than 3.2 million (41%) of enrolled veterans live in rural or highly rural areas.
- Medical and Prosthetic Research: \$580 million, the same as the President's Request and \$70 million above 2009, to include a \$48 million increase for research to address the critical needs of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans.
- Major and Minor Construction: \$1.9 billion, \$123 million above the President's Request and \$252 million above 2009.
- General Operating Expenses: \$2.1 billion, \$132 million below the President's Request and \$290 million above 2009, to enable the Department to hire roughly 1,200 additional claims processors to continue to work down the backlog of benefits claims and to reduce the time to process new claims. The most recent VA quarterly status report estimates that nearly 397,000 claims are pending. Additionally, the bill funds the Paralympics Program at the fully authorized amount of \$10 million.
- Inspector General: \$106 million to include increased funding to provide additional oversight personnel including initiatives regarding financial audit and information technology program reviews.
- MILITARY CONSTRUCTION: \$23.2 billion, \$1.8 billion below 2009 is provided for the base programs. The decrease from 2009 is attributable to the expected decline in BRAC construction requirements and the success of the family housing privatization program. In addition, \$1.4 billion is provided for Overseas Contingency Operations, for a total funding level in the bill of \$24.6 billion, \$226 million above the President's Request and \$472 million below 2009.
- Trainee Troop Housing Initiative: \$450 million to accelerate the Army's program to modernize troop housing facilities for trainees. The Army has a need for \$2.2 billion to bring all 115,413 trainee barracks spaces up to standard and the program currently is not scheduled to finish until 2017.
- Guard and Reserve Initiative: \$200 million in additional funding is provided for Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy and Marine Corps Reserve, and Air Force Reserve construction to address critical unfunded requirements, in recognition of the tremendous contributions made by Guard and Reserve personnel to emergency assistance, homeland security, and national defense.
- BRAC 1990 Environmental Cleanup: \$537 million, \$140 million above the President's Request and \$78 million above 2009, to address the large unfunded backlog of environmental cleanup for bases that were closed during the four previous BRAC rounds.

- 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and Re-stationing: \$7.5 billion, same as the President's request, to implement base closures and realignments, and support the re-stationing of troops and their families from overseas to the United States.
- Military Housing: \$2 billion, same as the President's Request, to further eliminate inadequate military housing.
- Overseas Contingency Operations: \$1.4 billion to support additional military construction requirements to support operations and troop increases in Afghanistan.

RELATED AGENCIES

- American Battle Monuments Commission: \$61.8 million, \$1.5 million above the President's Request and \$2.3 million above 2009. This funding provides for the care and operation of our military monuments and cemeteries around the world.
- United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims: \$28.1 million, including \$2.8 million for the Pro Bono Program to provide assistance to low income veterans.
- Cemeterial Expenses: \$42.5 million, \$5.3 million above the President's Request and \$5.8 million above 2009, for Arlington cemetery. The additional funding will enable relocation of power and telephone line to make ground available for over 8,000 gravesites.
- Armed Forces Retirement Home: \$134 million, the same as the President's Request and \$71 million above 2009, for the Armed Forces Retirement Home, including \$72 million for capital expenditures.